

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

I have looked on the first two months of the News-Letter as a trial period, in which I was learning a new job, and finding out what is in the minds of our members. Thanks to the many hundreds of letters I have had from you I see more clearly what we have to aim at. Out of the mass of helpful comment, advice, suggestion and criticism I single out one issue which is of crucial importance for the aims of the News-Letter.

In one or two letters it has been hinted that its outlook is too secular; others have suggested that it is too theological. There is a sense in which it would be a misfortune for it to be either, and another sense in which it cannot be either too theological or too secular.

It is certainly not its business to discuss in technical language the questions which are the special concern of the theologian. It must speak to the ordinary man in everyday language. If it does not do this it will fail.

But in another sense a Christian News-Letter must be theological or it is nothing. Even if it does its job properly, there may be a difficulty in understanding due to disagreement about what Christianity is. This is a matter about which those who call themselves Christians must make up their minds if we are ever going to arrive anywhere.

You will not expect me in a couple of pages to unfold the wealth of meaning in Christianity or to discuss the many diverse interpretations of it, even if I were competent to do either of these things. I only want to set in clear relief a basal issue.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

I will begin with the simplest of statements. We are told, at the beginning of the Gospel by Mark that "Jesus came, preaching the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand." That evidently in Mark's view was the core of his ministry and message. What is meant by the Kingdom of God? Oppressed by the injustice and suffering of the world, the Hebrew mind fixed its hopes on a coming time when God would intervene to put an end to evil, and establish the reign of truth and righteousness. What Jesus announced was that this final end of history was about to be realised, and that in his own person and deeds the powers of the coming age were already at work. We must let this fact sink into our minds to realise its astounding nature. The first Christians were animated by the amazing conviction that the event which gave history its final meaning, while its full consummation still lay in the future, had already happened. What other meaning can we give to their joyous assurance that an epoch-making change had taken place, and that they had been given an inner peace and freedom to serve God as His sons? No one

can read the New Testament attentively without recognising that its characteristic note is not so much of working *for* something to be achieved in the future as of living joyfully and victoriously *from* the experience of something already given.

Some of you have taken me to task for saying that Christianity is not a humanitarian programme for a better world, though it was not at all my intention to question that there is a sense in which Christianity is very definitely concerned with a better world. What I want to get rid of is the idea that the essence of Christianity is that it is an ideal for individual conduct or for the relations of men in society. Christianity entered the world as good news, and there is no nourishment, as they say in America in the proclamation of an ideal. The world has plenty of ideals; the problem is how to realise them. Christianity may, or may not, be true. But it is something vastly more important than the promulgation of an ideal. It is the assertion of a divine intervention in the world creating new possibilities of existence; of the entry into the world of a new power and energy of love with which we may ally ourselves. When the writers of the New Testament talk about a new creation and a new birth, I think they mean that men are called as members of the Kingdom of God into a new life a different from their natural life as that life is different from the life of the animals.

This, I know, is Greek to many people. But that is not because the language is difficult, nor because the statements are not plain and straightforward. The reason why such assertions appear incredible and meaningless is that the Church has become so assimilated to the world, that the distinction between man's natural and sinful existence and the new, redeemed order has become blurred, and because as individuals we have so small an understanding and experience of the new life which Christ brings to men.

From the point of view of making society better, what can possibly be more important than a Gospel of *salvation* which, by fixing men's hopes on God and not on themselves, delivers them from their fear and egoism and sets them free to serve God in the world as His sons? There can be no real improvement of society through the organisation and stimulation of worldly forces. A radical change can be brought about only by the leaven of something that is qualitatively different from what already is. It is from the men and women who cannot rest satisfied with the prevailing social standards and reach out towards the perfection to which Christ calls them that fresh moral energies are infused into society and renew its life.

MODERN SOCIETY

But while Christians are called to an entirely new life with a new set of values they have, like every one else, to live and work in the actual world. This world, in spite of its subjection to evil, is God's world. God has not deserted His creation. He is actively and creatively at work to redeem it. Christians have to co-operate with God in His redeeming purpose. They are members of an earthly as well as of a heavenly city; and it is in the faithful discharge of their responsibilities in the activities of the earthly city that they can serve and obey God in this present life.

And there's the rub. For modern society has become collective. In sharing in its activities a man is free only within narrow limits to act as an individual. Most of his acts he performs as a member of a corporate body. The choices open to him are limited in every direction by the purposes, traditions and established habits of the business, trades-union, administrative department or society to which he belongs. Moreover he is associated in these undertakings, and in the national life as a whole with many who are not Christians.

Now the point I wish to make is that the Christian in modern society has two quite different questions to deal with. He has, first and always, the question of his personal responsibility to God. In every situation he has to do what God requires of him in that situation.

But, secondly, he has also as a member of a corporate body to ask what is the right policy or decision for the common enterprise in which he is engaged with others, for the nation to which he belongs. This is a quite different question from the other. I do not believe there is any "Christian" solution of the problems of a society or enterprise that is pursuing other than Christian purposes. What advice has Christianity, which demands a radical change of mind and a wholly new set of values, to offer to those whose actions are directed to mistaken ends? The practical choices which in the tangled web of collective life are the only ones open to those engaged in its common activities may *all* of them fall far short of what, judged by the standards of the Kingdom of God, is objectively *good*. The only actual choice is between a course which promotes and one which impairs what the Christian believes to be the true values of human life. In choosing it may be at great personal cost—the former course, even by Christian standards it is only the lesser of two evils, the Christian is doing what God asks of him in that situation and, therefore, what is absolutely *right*.

There can be no question that this leavening of society with Christian insights and values is an inescapable necessity if we are to avoid an intolerable division in the Christian life. The surrender to its common purposes which modern society demands is possible for the Christian without self-degradation only if society is being progressively transformed in a Christian direction. In my next letter I shall ask what is involved in the imperative task of impregnating national and international life with the Christian leaven.

BOOTH OF TWO TRUTHS

In the meantime I want to urge that the first beginning of an understanding of the Christian task in the social and political sphere is to distinguish clearly in thought between the two questions I have indicated. Failure to do this is the source of a disastrous confusion in current thinking and discussion. Many people either think almost exclusively in terms of the personal responsibility of the individual Christian, and ignore the other quite different problem of corporate activities and the working of institutions; or, alternatively, resolve Christianity into a programme for the improvement of the collective life and forget the profound inner transformation which it demands from men and the heights of perfection to which it summons them. The two questions are, of course, inseparably related to one another. But because they have not been distinguished sufficiently clearly, Christian teaching has left people to cope with the problems of the collective life with a personal ethic which does not give them the guidance they need. We shall never get down to our job till we have made clear to ourselves that there are two quite different problems to which we have to address our minds.

I want the News-Letter to envisage clearly both these questions. I have explained the sense in which I would like its outlook to be theological. I want its outlook at the same time to be secular, in the sense that its constant concern is with the actual, present world of men's strivings and conflicts, which is the battleground between the Kingdom of God and the forces of darkness.

Bits of social, national, and international life are all the time being redeemed from evil through the faithful and courageous action of those who have yielded themselves

to God's rule; or alternatively, through lethargy or cowardice the collective life is allowed to fall under the control of demonic forces. Life is a real fight, and the triumph of right over wrong is a real victory. But the realisation of the Kingdom of God in this life is only fragmentary. The good we achieve contains fresh possibilities of evil as well as of further good. The perfected Kingdom of God remains a goal beyond the highest human achievement, and is an unrelenting judgment of our *best* as well as of our shortcomings.

The News-Letter must reflect both of these two truths—that the Kingdom of God *must* be realised in history and not in some imaginary, spiritual world detached from our historical existence, and that it is at the same time something so rich that every historical embodiment of it is only a distant approximation to its perfection; and it must do justice to them, not by an uncertain and halting compromise between them, but by the costly tension of trying to reach out after each to its furthest limits.

THE POPE'S ENCYCLICAL

I commend to your special attention this week's Supplement on the Pope's Encyclical. A considered utterance by the head of the largest Christian Church in the present crisis is an event of the highest importance, and its contents deserve to be not only read but pondered. It recalls us to an ancient wisdom. But there may be no greater revolutionary force than the thrilling re-discovery of forgotten truths and application of them to the conditions of a new age. If men's minds were seized with the conviction that there is a natural and moral order in the universe which they can disregard only at the cost of unending frustration and suffering, there would take place a revolution in Western civilisation more fundamental than those of Communism and National-Socialism. These are from one point of view only the culminating expression of the belief in the self-sufficiency of man which has for several centuries dominated the European outlook. It is nearly a hundred years since that remarkable personality David Urquhart clearly perceived and passionately denounced the denial of the eternal principles of justice which threatened the decay of Western society. Against this insidious influence the Papacy seemed to him the only bulwark, if it would fearlessly discharge its responsibility as the guardian of the moral law and "hold up to the nations the commandments of God for their entire and unswerving obedience." His dreams were not realised in the way that he hoped; but they may yet come true.

Yours sincerely,

D. H. Deane

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THE PAPAL ENCYCLICAL

1. The Encyclical *Summi Pontificatus* is in a line of direct succession to those of Pius XI, and particularly to *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937).

Inevitably the Pope, as the Head of a Church diffused throughout the world, offers no indictment of any particular people or State. But just as in *Quadragesimo Anno* Pius XI criticised a system of bureaucratic corporativism without specific reference to any particular country, so in *Summi Pontificatus* Pius XII, without any specific reference but with an application which the reader can make for himself, criticises any system of pagan totalitarianism which breaks "the tables of God's commandments" and substitutes standards "stripped of the ethical content of the Revelation on Sinai," in which "the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and of the Cross has no place."

Naturally, in opposition to an exclusive pagan totalitarianism, he emphasises the value and strength of Catholic world-wide solidarity, but he also acknowledges, with heartfelt gratitude, the good wishes of those who, though not belonging to the visible body of the Catholic Church, have expressed their appreciation of all that unites them to that Church.

Naturally, again, Pius XII, an Italian living in Italy, salutes "our dear Italy" in the beginning of his Encyclical, and accredits the Lateran Pacts of 1929 which have secured a "happy new juridical and spiritual position." And he also salutes, at the end of his Encyclical, "our dear Poland, which, for its fidelity to the Church, for its services in the defence of Christian civilisation, has a right to the sympathy of the whole world while it awaits the hour of resurrection."

A UNIVERSAL MORAL NORM

2. But the great theme of the Encyclical is a great and general theme of universal application. It is the theme of "a universal norm of morality, as well for individual and social life as for international relations": it is the same theme of natural law which Pius XI developed in the Encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*. The radical and ultimate cause of the evils in modern society, so his successor declares, is denial of a universal norm of morality and disregard of natural law. He ascribes the origin of this denial and disregard to Europe, and to the abandonment, in Europe, of that Christian teaching of which the Chair of St. Peter is the depositary and exponent—teaching which had once given spiritual cohesion to Europe and had enabled Europe to become the teacher of other continents. Abandoning that teaching, men have turned to a "laicization of society"; and laicizing society, they have withdrawn man, the family and the State from the controlling grace of that divine order under which, according to Christian teaching, men, families and States must live and move and have their being. The result is the disappearance of the old spiritual cohesion—the old cohesion of brotherhood. The result of that disappearance, in turn, is the chaos and dark night of our times. True, there were wars and surges of rebellious passion against the universal norm even in the old days of cohesion. But in those days there was still a way left open for honourable settlement at the end. To-day that way seems closed. And the reason is that to-day our dissensions come not only from the surge of rebellious passion against a universal norm, which is still acknowledged; they come from a spiritual crisis in which

the norm has gone and the principles of private and public morality are overthrown.

HUMAN SOLIDARITY

3. Two particular errors flow from this current religious and moral agnosticism—from disregard of natural law and denial of a universal norm of morality.

The first is the error of forgetting the law of human solidarity, imposed by the common origin of all men and by the equality of rational nature in all men. This common origin and this equality are themes which run through the Bible, from the book of Genesis to the Epistles of St. Paul; they are themes which issue in the conception of a unity of mankind which exists both in and by law (the law of human solidarity which is a part of natural law) and also in fact—the fact that individuals actually feel themselves united by their very nature.

The unity of mankind is not broken by the nations, which rather serve to enrich this unity by sharing their peculiar gifts and by exchanging their goods. The Church, accordingly, has never depreciated or disclaimed the particular national characteristics which each nation cherishes as its heritage—characteristics which, shared and exchanged, can only embellish the unity which the Church particularly cherishes. Similarly, the Church welcomes, rather than deprecates, methods of policy which seek to cultivate tendencies based in the individual character of each race—provided only that such methods are not opposed to the duties and obligations of common humanity. There is thus no danger that the sense of the unity of mankind, the consciousness of universal brotherhood, which is fostered by Christian teaching, should be opposed to love of the traditions of one's particular nation or race. On the contrary, it is a part of Christian teaching that the course of our loyalties shall follow a God-given order, and that we should give the place of honour in our affections to those bound to us by special ties of common nationality or common race. But the proper and duly ordered love of our special group should never blind us to the duty of a Christian charity owed to the general unity of mankind and the general law of human solidarity.

FALSE CLAIMS OF THE STATE

4. The second particular error which flows from disregard of natural law and denial of a universal law of morality is the error of divorcing the authority of civil government from dependence on the authority of God and the higher law derived from God. When the authority of God and that higher law are denied, civil government claims an absolute autonomy which belongs only to God, and elevates the State into the final end and supreme criterion, forbidding any appeal to the principles of natural reason and of Christian conscience. A civil government so divorced from dependence on God, and claiming an autonomy so absolute, issues in laws destitute of the moral force which is necessary for the effective operation of law; and though such a government may win material successes, the weakness of inward value and moral foundation from which it suffers involves its ultimate failure. The truth remains, on which Leo XIII insisted in his Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, that the sovereignty of civil government should regulate life according to the dictates of an order (the order expressed in natural law and the universal norm of morality) which changeless in its universal principles.

There are two dangers which arise from the claim of civil government to an absolute autonomy. There is a danger which is internal; and there is a danger which is external.

5. Internally, a civil government divorced from dependence on God and claiming absolute autonomy is a danger to the things at once—to individual responsibility to the family, and to education. It is particularly a danger to "the primary and essential cell of society, the family." The man of vision and good will can deny that the State, in the exceptional conditions of to-day, needs exceptional rights to meet popular needs. But even in times of emergency the moral law demands that every measure of the State should be scrutinised and judged by moral standards; and indeed it may be said that the more the State demands of the individual and the family in the way of material sacrifices, the more it is bound to respect the spiritual rights

conscience. "Goods, blood, it can demand: but the soul redeemed by God, never." The State may have the right to prepare its youth by its system of education for the offices of a noble patriotism; but it has never the right to interfere with the duties and rights of the Christian family in the sphere of religious training.

6. Externally, a civil government which aims absolute autonomy is a danger to the relations between peoples, since its aim infringes the unity of supra-national society and deprives of vigour the law of nations which is based on natural law. The natural order sanctioned by God not only divides mankind into mutually independent nations or States: it also binds mankind together by reciprocal ties—ties legal as well as moral—into a great commonwealth ruled by its own special laws of international conduct. The claim of absolute autonomy for the State offends natural law and leaves international relations at the mercy of the will of rulers. It thus abrogates the indispensable rule that the peoples and their States should recognise principles "international natural law"—principles which demand, first a respect from each State for the corresponding rights of other States, and secondly fidelity to pacts. That fidelity, involving observance of the plighted word, is the very soul of any system of legal relations; and though a pact made, or treaty signed, is subject to the passage of time and the substantial change of circumstances, there cannot be a unilateral scission of pacts and treaties, which would abolish all mutual trust between States and, with it, any system of legal relations between them. Joint modification, based on frank discussion, is the proper course, and the only course warranted by the principles of international natural law.

7. The Encyclical ends, after this analysis of the two great cardinal errors and their fatal consequences, with a review of the prospects of the future. The powerful ones of this world promise a new future, founded

on justice and prosperity, when once this war has ceased. That promise, and any hopes founded on it, are vain. No lasting peace can be built by the sword. It can only be built on the rock of natural law and divine revelation. The reason is that the evils which peace has to cure and remove are only in part due to economic instability and to unequal distribution of goods: their real root is deeper, and belongs to the sphere of religious beliefs and moral convictions.

8. Many, he ends by saying, are turning their gaze to the Catholic Church and the Chair of St. Peter, feeling that they may restore to mankind that unity of religious belief and moral conviction which once gave consistency to pacific international relations. That Church and that Chair have been, and are, generous in love to all; but they have been, and can be, firm when they have to say, whatever it cost, *non licet!* It is not allowed!

These are the words trembling on the lips of Pius XII as he ends. Will the Catholic Church, firmly drawing the practical logic of its principles, venture to utter aloud a great *non licet*? That is the question with which we are left as we end its reading. But as it stands it goes a long way to meet our hopes. It shows a notable sympathy for the non-Catholic Christian; and with all its balance, and its restraint, it offers a clear call to a line of thought, and a policy of action, which non-Catholic Christians cherish in the fibre of their being. When the new Encyclical is compared with that of Pius XI on Communism (*Divini Redemptoris*) of the year 1937, the same basic view is seen to pervade both; but in the profundity of its interpretation of a great crisis in history, and in its spirit of appreciation for the efforts of non-Catholic Christians *Summi Pontificatus* contains something new and something very stirring. The new Encyclical has a great ring.

ERNEST BARKER.

National Council of Social Service. The National Council of Social Service (26, Bedford Square, W.C.1) is issuing a mimeographed bulletin containing information of interest to social workers. The current issue (December 5) has items of information relating to the problems of evacuation, the service of youth and citizens' advice bureaux, requisitioning of premises, and other matters. Particulars may be obtained on application to the Council.

From the Post-Bag. Here is a refreshing letter from an industrial town, which shows that some people are getting ahead with real vigour: "A meeting was called at the Y.M.C.A. of all the local youth organisations. There were present representatives from the Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Toc H, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., the churches, Anglican and Free, and also one or two independently run clubs for boys. The local Education Committee, the Juvenile Delinquency people, and the Juvenile Unemployment Committee also sent representatives.

"These different groups wished to study and work with a view to championing the adolescent, and it has been already decided that one of the first tasks of the Committee will be to make a detailed survey of local youth. We shall seek to find out how many young people we have here between 14 and 18; how many are still at school—elementary, secondary, and especially at so-called commercial schools—and also the numbers at the technical daytime and evening classes; how many are in voluntary organisations meeting on weekdays or Sundays, and what their programme is; what jobs the workers among them have got, what their hours are, and what unemployment there is. With the aid of such a survey we hope to be able to become well-informed about local youth in his job, in his leisure, in his education and in his troubles.

"We shall also study local voluntary organisations in respect of their premises, personnel and leadership, supply of youngsters, programme and resources. We shall seek to plan a policy of co-operation. We shall also, I hope, become interested in the school-leaving age and help to build up public opinion on the subject."

The French Attitude on Peace Aims. Nothing is more surprising than the way in

which peace aims are discussed as though the peace settlement were primarily a matter that concerned this country and Germany. French opinion will have as large a say as that of this country, not to mention the views of neutral countries. A statement by a number of eminent French professors is published in the *Tablet* of December 16 and shows a considerable divergence between French thought and the ideas put forward in many quarters in this country. The issue of *Nouveaux Cahiers* of November 1, 1919 (Librairie Gallimard, 5 rue Sébastien-Bottin, Paris, 7e), contains contributions from an able group in France, whose outlook is nearer to the present predominant tendencies in Great Britain.

Nansen's Guiding Principles. Mr. Norman Baker in a broadcast talk quotes three rules by which Nansen had always been guided both in his explorations and in his work for the League of Nations. These were:—

"Never stop because you are afraid—you are never so likely to be wrong."

"Never keep a line of retreat: it is a wretched invention."

"The difficult is what takes a little time; the impossible is what takes a little longer."

Aids to Prayer. Readers of the *New Letter* may be glad to have their attention called to the following manuals:—*Prayers Time of War*, edited by Hugh Martin (S.C.M. Press, 2s.), an anthology of prayers covering a wide ground and drawn from many sources; *Per Christum Vincas* (Longmans, Green and Co., 6d.), edited by Ethel M. Barton for use in the last war, when it brought help to many and now reprinted with the addition of several new prayers; *A Manual of Prayers for War Time*, compiled by the Archbishop of York (A. R. Mowbray, 6d.), which includes the excellent "Form of Prayer for use by Christian People in all Countries" already published as a separate leaflet by the S.P.C.K.; and *The Church in Germany in Prayer* (A. R. Mowbray, 2s. 6d.), and English translation of a collection of German prayers.

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